

## Two Healings

I almost always put the bulletins together early in the week. Part of doing that is finding a picture for the bulletin cover. It's almost become something of a spiritual practice.

I usually use one of a couple of websites where the pictures are copyright free. Sometimes not much really grabs me and I'll just find a picture depicting a character in the story or an image of something in the story. But sometimes I simply enter a key word from the story. Those often bring up the most interesting pictures.

For this week, I used the word healing. As I scrolled through, I saw lots of pictures of pills and hypodermic needles. There were several images of the Covid 19 virus and how the vaccine attacks it.

There were multiple images from the various Eastern religious practices – like the Chakras of Hindu and the lotus position of Buddhism. There were pictures of herbs and herbal teas and healing crystals.

But there was also a surprising number of pictures of hiking trails. And those were the ones that spoke to me. There is nothing more healing to me in mind, body, and spirit, than a hiking trail that beckons you forward.

The collection of photos on Pixabay that comes up under healing invites us to think more about what healing really means.

Often, we think of it as curing a disease. In the 21st century, doctors could probably cure both the woman with the hemorrhage and the little girl.

The woman with the hemorrhage probably had what is called dysfunctional uterine bleeding. It has various causes and since we don't even know her age, we can't say much about what caused hers. But between hormones and various surgical procedures, it's almost always curable – or at least manageable – today.

And we have no idea what the little girl had. But in that era, infectious diseases were the most common illnesses which killed children. In our era of safer sanitary practices and vaccines, many of those diseases now rarely even happen. And better supportive care and antibiotics save lives that once would have been lost.

I consider the medical advances no less miraculous than Jesus curing the sick, since I believe God created us with brains and gives some of us the ability to bring about those advances. But

that has led us to take for granted that most people will at least live to adulthood and more often than not old age.

Eventually we will all get something which can't be cured and one day we will die. But think of all the healing your body does – sometimes with the help of medicine, sometimes not – on all the other days.

Besides taking life and health for granted, another downside to the great scientific and medical advances is the narrowing of our understanding of healing.

I probably spend more than the average amount of time thinking about healing in the context of faith than many other people because of my first career. My reasons for leaving medicine were complex, but at least part of it was a feeling that we often never really got to the root of people's problems. Pills and injections could treat things...and often do it quite well.

But so often health and illness are a complex mesh of not just physical but psychological, social, and spiritual components. And we mostly don't do a great job with any but the physical. Social workers, mental health therapists, and chaplains can do amazing things to heal, but are too often undervalued. And perhaps all of that is what gets taken up by the word faith – like when Jesus says to the woman, your faith has made you well. There is more to healing than medical cure.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm very pro-science and I'm grateful for the advances that medicine has made. My own mom would never have made it to almost 90 without them. She might not have even lived past childhood if it hadn't been for the discovery of sulfa. I'm grateful that most cemeteries no longer hold rows of tiny graves of children who died in some major epidemic and I'm grateful that we no longer need polio wards.

Also don't hear me say that when cure doesn't happen it must be because faith was lacking.

But when we equate healing with only cure, we are missing so much.

Jesus did more than just cure these two women. If cure was the only thing he was after, there was no real reason he needed to stop and find out who touched him when he was making his way through the crowd. There was an important man – a leader of the synagogue – whose daughter needed Jesus' touch, too. He needed to hurry.

But, for Jesus there was always more to healing than cure. It was important for him to see the woman as a person...to see her humanity. To call her daughter. To signal her restoration, not only physically, but emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

And then Jesus tells her to go in peace. The word here is Shalom. Shalom is a Hebrew word that means so much more than what we think of when we think of peace. It means not just the absence of fighting, but true harmony. It means justice and well-being for all.

I think maybe that is something closer to what I feel hiking and why pictures of hiking trails figured so prominently in a search of healing. On a hiking trail in the wild there is a sense of oneness with nature and God, a sense of well-being in body and soul.

It's a time when you really can only focus on what's around you, especially if the trail is challenging. It's a true exercise in being present in the moment – something which is always healing.

Shalom is all those things that physical cure is by itself not. It is the healing work of social workers, counselors, pastors, and praying families and friends. In a situation where healing is prayed for, shalom can happen whether someone is cured or not.

In her book, *In God's Presence*, theologian Marjorie Suchocki tells a story about her son-in-law. He was a young man with a wife and young children when he was diagnosed with lymphoma. He did the whole chemotherapy thing, but it gradually became clear he was not going to be cured.

During the time between that realization and his death, he joined a prayer group from their church. The group was all older women except for him. They met regularly to pray for other people. The deep sense of connection and really, shalom he got from that prayer group and from praying for others was for him very healing, even though he was dying.

That brings us to Jairus' daughter. Jesus didn't just heal her. He raised her from the dead.

These miracle stories can be difficult. For those of us who tend to wrestle with faith and with God, we think of those for whom that miracle cure never happens.

True, we can point to stories where healing happens even in the midst of inevitable death. But there's no real faithful way to gloss over or sugarcoat the agony of parents who lose a child or when natural disasters bring death and destruction. When we try to explain things away, or feel some sort of need to defend God, we are making too little of the power of death.

The raising of Jairus' daughter should be seen as something of a foretaste of Jesus' victory over death. At this point in Mark's story, Jesus has shown power over illness, power over paralysis, power over demons, power over creation when he calmed a storm. Here we see Jesus' power over death itself.

But it is a foretaste. We still live in a time when death is a very real presence...and one that can seem unbeatable. And the ultimate victory over death truly is something we cling to only by faith. While that may seem impossible when we try to imagine it, in the end, when we actually face it, it turns out to be the only thing we can find to cling to.

And when we reach out to cling to Jesus...even to the edge of his garment, we are clinging to that faith that he will turn and see us, and offer us true healing and shalom.